A

SERMON,

Preached in the Presbyterian Church,

IN THE CITY OF RICHMOND, MAY 1820.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE

Young Men's Missionary Society,

BY THE

REV. BENJAMIN H. RICE,

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To the Young Men, composing the Missionary Society of Richmond, the following Sermon is inscribed, with ardent Prayer for their success, in the good cause, for the promotion of which they are associated, and for their own personal welfare in time and eternity.

THE AUTHOR.

SERMON.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation; that Jesus Christ, came into the world to save sinners.

1st. TIMOTHY, I. 15.

THE declaration that Jesus Christ came into the world to save Sinners, is true, and therefore worthy of belief. It is, good news and therefore worthy of being cordially received by all mankind. To yield the assent of the understanding to the proposition contained in the text, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save Sinners, and to receive it with affection, is, to give the saying of the Apostle, that acceptance of which it is worthy. Man is a Sinner, and the assertion applies to the whole hu-

man family. We are led by the language of the Apostle, to consider the first condition of Sinners; and the nature of the Salvation proposed in the Gospel.

1st. What is the condition of man as a Sinner?

It is answered; he is guilty, polluted, ignorant, helpless and miserable.

1st. Man is a guilty creature. Sin is the transgression of the law. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous; no not one. By one man's disobedience Sin entered into the world; and death by Sin; and so death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.—Death is the penalty of the law, incurred by transgression. All having transgressed, are therefore liable to punishment. But the mere exposedness of the transgression to punishment is not the only idea included in the term guilty. The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good. The obligation that binds the subject of God's moral government, to love, honour and obey Him, is coextensive with the divine perfections. His perfections are infinite. Infinite therefore are the bonds of that high and holy allegiance, which Man is under to his Maker. The Sinner is then, not only *liable* to suffer punishment; but he *deserves* to suffer a punishment, equal to his crime. His crime

being the violation of an infinite obligation, he deserves to suffer an infinite punishment.

2d. Man is polluted. We use the term polluted, because it is contained in the Scriptures, the source of all satisfactory knowledge of the relations that man sustains to his Maker. The Scriptures furnish a great variety of representations on this subject, by which are to be understood a destitution of holiness and the presence and power of Sin. This state of man shews itself in acts of impiety, in the indulgence of fleshly lusts, in the practice of vice, and in every way by which he degrades himself from the dignity becoming a rational creature, and the rectitude that should characterise an accountable agent. The pollution of Man is evinced by the grossness of his pleasures, the sordidness of his views, and the sensuality of his whole life; by the alienation of his affections from God, his enmity to the law of God, which is holy, just, and good, and his blindness to the glory and excellency of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3d. Man is ignorant. The natural man, receiveth not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. He is ignorant of the attributes of Jehovah, of the relations he sustains to his God, of the duties he owes, and of the extent and force of the obligations by which he is

bound. The whole history of man is but an exposition of the doctrine of human depravity, and joins with the word of God, to disclose his folly, his pollution, his guilt and ignorance. Man, without the light of revelation, has almost universally fallen into the grossest idolatry; and where that light has shone, how generally applicable is the reproof of the Psalmist; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself. But the ignorance of man is especially discovered in relation to his acceptance with God. What monstrous expedients has he tried! And how have they been marked by absurdity and folly and cruelty and weakness and depravity.

Upon his prospects there rests a dark cloud, penetrable only by the rays of that light, which beams from the holy volume of inspiration; and he must ever ask in vain, whither am I going, and what is to be my eternal destiny, until he turns his eye to this glorious light.

4th. Man is helpless. He has contracted a debt to the law and justice of God, which he is utterly unable to pay. He has bound himself in chains of iniquity, which he can never dissolve. He has sunk himself into a pollution, which nothing at his command can wash away. He has erred in his heart, until he has lost all knowledge of the ways of righteousness, and knows not how to return. He has ruined himself; and there is no eye to pity, and

no hand to bring relief among all the ranks of creatures throughout the boundless dominion of Jehovah. By the deeds of the law can no flesh living be justified.

5th. Man is miserable. Sin has opened the source, whence flow all the streams that embitter human life, and poison the cup of our earthly inheritance. It has converted this beautiful world, designed for the pleasurable abode of the human family, into a vale of tears, and a place of graves. Sin has transformed conscience into a worm that never dies, thrown the guilty creature far off from his God, gathered over him the dark clouds of divine wrath, kindled the fires of Hell, and opened for him a passage to the tomb, and far beyond, to the shades of eternal night. Thus have we taken a cursory view of the condition of man as a sinner.

II. We proceed now to consider the provisions of the gospel, under the second head proposed in the plan of our discourse.

We have seen man, a guilty, polluted, ignorant, helpless and miserable creature. What is the nature of the salvation offered in the Gospel?

The provisions of the Gospel are so adapted to the condition of man, as to commend it to the acceptance of all mankind. Jesus Christ came into

the world to save sinners; and in order to accomplish this labour of love, He who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person, became incarnate, was born of a woman, and made under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law. Having taken our nature into vital union with his own, he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, and the chastisement that procured our peace, was laid upon him. All we, like sheep, had gone astray, we we had turned every one to his own way, and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. He suffered under the law, and under the imputation of the sins of his people, so that for the sake of his sufferings they are discharged from the dreadful penalty incurred by transgression. The sword of divine justice blazing with a fire, which nothing but blood could extinguish, descended, and had cut off the whole guilty race; but the Lord Jesus Christ interposed, received the descending stroke, quenched its raging fires in the blood of his own heart, and turned away the fierce anger of the Lord. The law demanded a perfect obedience to its precepts, and a full satisfaction to its penalty; and the Lord Jesus Christ magnified the law, and made it honourable. Now God can be just and justify the believer in Jesus.

But man is depraved as well as guilty. The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. The

heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The Lord Jesus Christ, however, not only accomplished a deliverance from condemnation, but from pollution. Ascending in triumph from the finished work of atonement, he sends down the Holy Spirit, by whose gracious operations, the polluted heart is purified, the alienated affections are recovered from their prostitution, and fixed on God. The soul is subdued to obedience, and the law of God becomes an object of delight. This is the grace that alone can effectually reform the sinner.—Under its influence, the drunkard becomes a sober man, the profane swearer learns to fear an oath, the Sabbath breaker keeps holy the day of God, the proud are humbled, the groveling elevated, the cold heart of selfishness is warmed, and all who become the subjects of its power, are made to understand their relations, to perform their duties, and thus are purified from their pollutions.

But man is ignorant, as well as guilty and polluted. The perplexing question, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God?"—a question, on which no light is thrown from all the other sources of knowledge open to the human family—is satisfactorily answered in the Gospel of Christ. By the gospel, man is enlightened to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. By the exposition given of the divine law, by this holy prophet of his people, the nature and

extent of its obligations are disclosed. The clouds which covered in darkness the prospects of fallen man, are dissipated by the light that beams from the sun of righteousness, and he beholds the judgment set, and the human family collected, and divided, and raised to endless glory or sunk to endless perdition.

But man is helpless, as well as guilty and polluted and ignorant. Unable to maintain his standing against the power of corruption, and the force of temptation, he is upheld by the arm of omnipotence. Too weak to resist the assaults of Satan, the power of Christ defends him, so that the believer can say, when I am weak, then am I strong. I can do all things through Christ strengthening me. The Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

But man is miserable as well as guilty and polluted, and ignorant and helpless. Is he the child of affliction? The gospel opens before him an overflowing fountain of consolation. Does he walk through a vale of tears? The gospel puts a song of praise into his mouth to the God of grace, who has promised to make all things work together for the good of those that love Him. While he toils along the wearisome and painful journey of life, the gospel points him to the rest that remains for the people

of God. When the tender cords that bind human hearts together, are severed by the hand of death, the gospel commands the mourning survivor, not to sorrow as those who have no hope; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also, which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him.— When we suffer under injurious treatment in this world of violence, the gospel refers us to the final judgment, where all wrongs shall be righted, all unpardoned iniquity punished, and all pious and patient suffering amply rewarded. When we are conducted down the hill of life and stand trembling on the verge of the dark valley and shadow of death, the Gospel throws the light of its glory across the gloomy vale, shines upon the brilliant prospects, which lie beyond that scene of terror, and awakens in the ears of the departing believer the sweet harmony of heaven, and the ever during song of praise unto him that loved us and gave himself for us and made us kings and priests unto God. At this interesting hour, Death, to the followers of Jesus an angel of peace, cuts the cords of mortal life, and they enter into the joy of their Lord. Exulting in this joy the soul shall abide until the Lord Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Arch-Angel and with the trump of God. Then shall all that are in the graves, hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then shall this

mortal put on immortality, and this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and death be swallowed up in victory. Then shall the whole multitude of the redeemed, in one vast congregation join in the song of triumph, "O Death! where is thy sting! O grave! where is thy victory." The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law: but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

It now remains to make a practical use of this interesting subject. You have been led to contemplate the deplorable condition of man, as a sinner, guilty, polluted, ignorant, helpless and miserable. You have seen the adaptation of the provisions of the gospel to all his wants. It presents pardon to the guilty, purification to the polluted, instruction to the ignorant, strength to the weak, consolation to the afflicted, and eternal blessedness to all, who cordially accept of Jesus Christ as the saviour of sinners. He is, by the blessings he confers and by the wretchedness of man, commended to our acceptance. Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for you, is, that you all may receive Christ Jesus as your saviour, and that he may become your wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

To you, my young friends, for whose benefit this discourse is delivered, I would recommend the cordial acceptance of that gospel, which you wish to be instrumental in conveying to others. It will then become the guide of your youth, and the solace of of your declining age. It will seal to you the pardon of your sins, and cheer you under the sufferings of this life, and prepare you for the life to come. It will melt your hearts into pity for your guilty, polluted, ignorant, helpless and miserable fellow men. It will animate you with a more active zeal, and secure your perseverance in the benevolent and honourable work, which you have pledged yourselves, by your association, to perform. Receive with gratitude the gospel of salvation and it will say to you with strong assurance, "Be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; *for as much as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*" Go forward, beloved youth. Let no difficulties damp your ardour; let no allurements turn your eyes from the objects of wretchedness on which they are fixed; let not the love of pleasure, so ensnaring to the young, close your ears and harden your hearts against the cries of your fellow creatures, perishing for the bread of life.

In behalf of your sons, your brothers, your friends, I call upon all who hear me, to aid them with the means of sending the glad tidings of salvation to

perishing sinners. Various and powerful are the motives, which should induce compliance with our solicitations. In the midst of the moral desolation which sin has produced, you are called this day to refresh your eyes with the vigorous branches, and green foliage, and swelling fruit of a young scion, which needs your fostering care, that its branches may extend and shade your land, and its fruit be multiplied, for the recovery of the dying, and the resurrection of the dead to a life of virtue and piety, of charity and peace. While your aching eye and your sickened heart, are turned away from the blight and mildew that selfishness and sin have spread around, to behold this lovely spectacle; can you refuse the culture which alone can make it flourish?

When these your sons, pointing to the scenes of woe that on every hand present themselves to the eye of observation, ask you with eager desire, for the means of their alleviation, will you chill their ardour by a cold refusal? If your fellow men from any quarter of the globe, should, in perishing circumstances, petition for the bread that sustains a precarious life, you *could* not refuse. If your neighbours and friends, were writhing in the agonies of hunger and thirst in your presence, you would, with strong emotions, divide with them, even to the last morsel, and rejoice that you could contribute a mite to the relief of suffering humanity. And will you, *can* you withhold your contributions, when

you hear the cry of souls, perishing for the bread and the water of eternal life?

Alas! what multitudes are wandering as sheep, without a shepherd, and have none to guide them to the fold of Christ, the Shepherd and Bishop of souls. Can you sit with gratitude, under the ministrations of the gospel, from Sabbath to Sabbath, and feel no compassion for those, who have no house of prayer, no sacramental board, no holy day; who never hear the warning voice of their righteous sovereign, and are never soothed by the sweet accents of heavenly mercy? Can you contemplate the thousands that are under all the power of sin, led captive by the Devil at his will, exposed to the wrath of God, involved in all the darkness of error, and utterly helpless; and make no effort to instruct, to redeem and to save them from endless perdition? Oh! can you see the growing iniquities of the people, and behold the gathering and lowering clouds of divine wrath, ready to burst over their guilty heads, and not say to the Missionary Society—Here! take of our substance and send, O! send quickly, the messenger of mercy, the Ambassador of Christ, to beseech them to be reconciled to God.

Scattered through our widely extended country, are to be found, many of the humble followers of Christ, your brethren in the Lord, who, by the circumstances of their connections or by their ne-

cessities, are cut off from the visible family of the Lord and almost never enjoy the sweet privileges of the house of God. Oh! if you could see the joy that sparkles in their eyes, and beams from their countenances, when the Missionary with his presence, cheers their humble dwellings, and by his pious discourse, awakens and invigorates their languishing graces; could you hear their earnest request, "O, visit us again!" all your calculations of prudence and economy, would give way to fraternal love, and every heart would be expanded, and every hand be opened to send them relief.

It now and then happens that in the dessolate regions, which stretch all around us, poor, guilty creatures are awakened to a sense of their perishing condition; and the anxious cry is extorted, "what must we do to be saved!" But there is none to point them to the lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. Will you not afford the means of sending to them, the herald of the cross, who shall instruct them in the way of salvation? Can you regard man as guilty, polluted, ignorant, helpless and miserable; see him going down to the darkness of the grave, and the despair of the pit, and decline to preach to him, by all the means and instruments you can employ, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save sinners? These efforts, your rightful sovereign requires at your hands. To liberal contributions for pious, benevolent and useful pur-

poses, he encourages his people by the declaration, that he who soweth bountifully, shall reap bountifully; but he that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly. The cause which this day demands your support, is a good cause; it is the cause of God, of humanity, of charity, of mercy. It is the cause of your country; it is interesting to the universe. And if any shall refuse his becoming offerings, for the support of this cause, "I am prepared to see him put his money in a bag with holes; sow much and reap little; and the iniquity of his covetousness descending upon his children's children."

We said that this is the cause of our country.—Ours is a government of laws, and the power, as it should be, is in the hands of the people. Our institutions are good, and no radical change can be advantageously effected. These positions need no confirmation. But the maintainance of our principles, and the preservation of our constitution and form of government, depend very much, if not exclusively, under God, upon the intelligence and virtue of the people. Astonishing is the growth of our population, and small the means of moral culture. If the people greatly out grow the means of intellectual and moral improvement, our country must be ruined. Man is depraved; there is in him a tendency to deeper depravity; consequently he needs a more powerful restraint than human laws, and especially when those laws are made and executed by

himself. To hold him back from crime, he requires the sanctions of the divine law. To lead him in the paths of virtue, he needs the holy precepts of the gospel. To subdue him to the benevolence, patience, forbearance, love of justice and practice of holiness, which secure his well being both in time and eternity, he needs the powerful grace of the gospel. To give to this benign and holy religion its efficiency, public teachers must be employed. If then you would be instrumental in preserving the freedom, the order and the happiness of your beloved country; if you would instruct the ignorant, purify the polluted, dispense pardon to the guilty, afford consolation to the afflicted, and light up the way of darkling man, to heavenly mansions, and eternal rest; endeavour to multiply the number of enlightened ministers of the gospel, and as extensively as possible, employ them for the propagation of the glorious truth, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

Let us all join with the benevolent and the pious of other places and in other nations, to make known this salvation to the ends of the earth, that all may unite with the angelic choir, in the song of glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will to men.

E R R A T A.

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